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ABSTRACT

C-SPAN videotapes provide an innovative database that promises to be a significant benefit to researchers of public figures and issues by allowing researchers to analyze public figures in their own words, without journalistic interpretation. Such analysis was applied to Ross Perot's 1992 campaign in addressing his perceived insensitivity to diversity. Perot's perceived insensitive comments do not substantiate an intolerant attitude, and several additional citations from the C-SPAN tapes confirm Perot's sensitivity. (Contains a list of the 14 C-SPAN tapes reviewed.) (EF)

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USING C-SPAN TO STUDY ROSS PEROT'S EXPRESSION OF SENSITIVITY AND INSENSITIVITY WITH DIVERSITY ISSUES DURING THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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USING C-SPAN TO STUDY ROSS PEROT'S EXPRESSION OF SENSITIVITY AND INSENSITIVITY WITH DIVERSITY ISSUES DURING THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Communication scholars have acknowledged the use of C-SPAN as a teaching tool in resources such as C-SPAN in the Communication Classroom: Theory and Application (Muir, 1992). This article describes how C-SPAN can be used for research purposes, specifically as a data base. C-SPAN research potential is exemplified through description of a study conducted to analyze the rhetoric of Ross Perot.

The primary topic of this inquiry focuses on Perot's expression of sensitivity and insensitivity with diversity issues during the 1992 presidential campaign. Perot was frequently accused of being insensitive toward diversity issues during the campaign. I analyzed the content and context of his speeches to see if there is evidence to support this claim made by Perot critics.

C-SPAN tapes analyzed in this project were obtained from the Public Affairs Video Archives (located at Purdue University). The Archives provided me with an index listing all of Perot's presentations delivered during the presidential campaign period (January-November, 1992) that were covered by C-SPAN. A total of 55 presentations are available on videotape. Fourteen of these videotapes, that are representative of Perot's presentations (in content, context, & format), were selected for analysis.

The following is a list of the selected videotapes. Videotape title, date, format, and length are listed for each

presentation.

1. Life and Career of Ross Perot (3/18/92)
   American Profile Interview (1:03)

2. Perot Candidacy: American Newspaper Publishers Association
   (5/5/92) Speech (:34)

3. University of Oklahoma Commencement Address (5/9/92)
   Speech (:21)

4. Perot Campaign Speech: NAACP Annual Convention (7/11/92)
   Speech (:35)

5. Perot Withdrawal (7/16/92)
   News Conference (:20)

6. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/6/92)
   Broadcast (:29)

7. Presidential Candidates Debate (10/11/92)
   Debate (1:36)

8. Presidential Candidates Debate (10/15/92)
   Debate (1:32)

9. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/15/92)
   Broadcast (:30)

10. Presidential Candidates Debate (10/19/92)
    Debate (1:38)

11. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/20/92)
    Speech (:31)

12. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/26/92)
    Broadcast (:31)

13. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/28/92)
    Political Event (:28)

14. Perot Campaign Commercial (10/30/92)
    Broadcast (:29)

There is no widely accepted paradigm for analyzing a speaker's sensitivity with diversity issues so this inquiry poses unique challenges. What connotates sensitivity? What connotates insensitivity? Use of C-SPAN tapes to study the aforementioned subject is particularly relevant in that the

C-SPAN index helps define the sample to be studied and the tapes provide literal verbal meanings, indirect nonverbal meanings, and context for speeches. Transcripts provide literal statements but the tapes frame the literal statements. Perot was criticized after his speech to the NAACP convention, according to the Public Affairs Video Archives index abstract, for his "apparent paternalistic nature" toward minorities. Analysis of this type of criticism rests on what is said and equally on how it is said.

The hypothesis for this study is that Perot's presentations contain statements conveying insensitivity with diversity issues. The formulation of this hypothesis is based primarily on newspaper reports of Perot's aforementioned June 11, 1992 speech to the NAACP convention. The Washington Post reported "Perot drew a cool reception from the group when he referred to blacks as 'you people' and 'your people'". (Washington Post, July 12, 1992). The Chicago Tribune referred to Perot's use of "you people" and "your people" as "a gaffe in his speech that offended some in the audience as racially insensitive" (Chicago Tribune, July 12, 1992). This speech is significant in that the next Perot tape listed in the Public Affairs Video Archives index features Perot's withdrawal from the presidential campaign.

Data relevant to the research question of this inquiry, regarding Perot's sensitivity/insensitivity toward minority issues, was studied by viewing all the aforementioned

videotapes. This data includes ten hours and 37 minutes of videotape. The data clearly disproves the hypothesis of this study (that Perot's presentations would contain statements conveying insensitivity with diversity issues). Perot's statements consistently convey sensitivity with diversity issues.

The following is a collection of representative statements made by Perot (regarding diversity in America). All of these statements convey sensitivity with diversity. The dates listed are referenced in the previous listing of Perot presentations analyzed in this study.

"Our diversity is our strength, we've turned it into a weakness. . . . If you hate people I don't want your vote" (10/11/92). "If you don't mind living in a society where one out of eight women are raped I don't want your vote" (5/5/92). "We're not gonna turn the clock back. Segregating would hurt the economy" (3/18/92). "Our country will not be great until we are all united and equal. . . . I cannot be free until we are all free" (7/11/92).

The only speech containing comments perceived offensive is the 7/11/92 speech to the NAACP convention. In this speech Perot's referral to the black audience as "you people" and "your people" was perceived by some to be racially insensitive. However, the NAACP is a self defined organization (comprised of African-Americans). To refer to such a group as a distinctive entity, which the organization does with it's name and objective, does not substantiate

Perot is insensitive to diversity issues. The aforementioned Perot quotes clearly establish his sensitivity with diversity.

Study of Perot is relevant in this context. He came from relative obscurity in the spring, 1992 and within seven months received 19% of the popular vote in the presidential campaign. He may be a powerful force in the 1996 campaign. At the 1992 "Off the (Video) Record" research conference, sponsored by the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University, Perot was mentioned more than Bush or Clinton as a relevant topic for analysis in that his candidacy was so unique and without explanation.

Perot's candidacy sparked considerable debate. Scholars will no doubt be defining Perot's future in reference to his past. Findings from this type of study help set the agenda for analysis of Perot.

The research format used in this study can easily be applied with other speakers and with a variety of research questions. C-SPAN tapes allow researchers to analyze public figures in their own words, without journalistic interpretation. Public presentations can be studied in their entirety (rather than selected excerpts). Thus, C-SPAN videotapes provide an innovative data base that promises to be a significant benefit to researchers of public figures and issues.

References

Chicago Tribune. July 12, 1992, p. 6.

Muir, Jannette K. C-SPAN in the Communication Classroom: Theory and Application. Annandale, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1992.

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